

# **A SMART GROWTH FUTURE FOR CHESTER**

**Presented to  
The New Hampshire  
Office of State Planning**

**As part of the  
GrowSmart NH Tool-Kit Project**

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## **A. Introduction: The Need for Smart Growth**

New Hampshire is currently growing “at a rate approaching 15,000 people each year.”<sup>1</sup> This growth makes New Hampshire the vibrant state it is; it brings new jobs, new people and new ideas. At the same time, however, it also brings new challenges.

Unmanaged, this growth threatens to destroy the very qualities that make New Hampshire a great place to live.

Sprawling growth moves away from our town centers, leaving downtowns struggling. It spreads residential development across the rural landscape on large lots, eliminating the farms and woodlots of the working landscape--the pieces that are the very essence of rural character. The resulting pattern of development leaves islands of single uses widely spread apart from each other. In many areas the automobile becomes the only logical way of reaching these far-flung districts. Instead of the traditional mixed use patterns of development, where at least some residential development was directly accessible to downtowns that provided a variety of commercial, industrial, and institutional activities, we have residential subdivisions and office parks far outside of downtown. Instead of small-scale retail centers, we have stores and retail complexes hundreds of thousands of square feet in size, surrounded by acres of parking. In doing so, we are losing any traditional, distinctive New Hampshire character.<sup>2</sup>

Sprawl in its simplest terms is growth of land use that exceeds growth of population. Sprawl is bad because it is expensive — it increases the cost of municipal services and thus taxes; it destroys the traditional land uses of forestry and agriculture; it makes us more dependent on the automobile, thus increasing traffic, congestion and air pollution; it increases water pollution; it reduces wildlife habitat; and it destroys the small town, rural character that is so much a part of New Hampshire’s birth right.

Sprawl occurs not because of the malevolence of developers or the incompetence of government. Developers respond to market forces within the rules established by state and municipal governments. At times, however, the rules are not coherent, consistent or logically linked to the goals they are intended to realize. Sometimes rules designed for one desirable purpose have unintended, undesirable, consequences. For example:

- Planning Boards and other municipal bodies are under increasing pressure to “do something” in the face of growing population pressure and increasing tax rates.

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<sup>1</sup> NH Office of State Planning Report to Governor Shaheen on Sprawl, December 1999. p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

- Many towns have had unpleasant experiences with poorly planned and hastily executed “affordable” housing projects and “cluster” developments that have made them gun-shy about new ideas for growth management.
- While the goals of “Smart Growth” may be clear by contrast to sprawl— it’s everything sprawl is not – the practical guidelines for putting these theoretical ideals to work are few and far between.
- The myriad of existing regulations often have unintended consequences which tend to impede the realization of “Smart Growth” goals:
  - β 3 acre zoning intended to preserve a rural flavor results in fields full of suburban homes;
  - β Lot coverage and parking regulations intended to prevent squalor result in downtowns with empty second and third floor spaces;
  - β Use regulations intended to protect health in a residential area results in limits on farming that hastens the loss of large tracts of working open space.

In short, for “Smart Growth,” the devil truly is in the details.

The central focus of the “GrowSmart NH” project is to bridge the gap between theory and practice and provide a usable link between the principles of Smart Growth and their application in municipalities.

This report is a first step for providing that link for the town of Chester.

## B. What is Smart Growth?

The forces of change are enormous and seem to come from all sides—more people, more traffic, changing jobs, higher taxes—and they seem impossible to understand and control—the global economy, new threats to environmental and personal health, changed cultural and moral values. Given these pressures, it is understandable that taxpayers and communities often respond with a loud “STOP!” Growth caps, tax caps, budget cuts, all are natural responses to situations that appear overwhelming. What “Smart Growth” counsels here is not to jump to any particular “solution,” but rather to step back and look at the essential qualities of the community. At base, Smart Growth is an affirmation of those values that constitute the character of an area, of the values that determine its:

- *Sense of Place*  
What are the places and qualities, both natural and human-made, that give the community its character? What is the feeling that arises from living in the community? What are residents proud to show visitors? What reflects the community’s history? What reflects the community’s attachment to its woods, fields, rivers, streams and ponds?
- *Sense of Community*  
How do people in the community know and feel about one another? What factors, both physical and social, shape their interactions? Where do people gather? Shop? Vote? Celebrate? Play?
- *Sense of Economy*  
What does the community feel it can afford? What does it want for itself, and what is it willing to spend to get it? How does the community shape public policy, and how do members of the community participate in decision making?

Smart Growth says, “First, decide on your vision. Then explore the possible ways to achieve it.” In practical terms, “Smart Growth” consists of evaluating and shaping all new development and re-development initiatives according to the following eight principles:

1. Maintain traditional **compact settlement** patterns to efficiently use land, resources and infrastructure investments;
2. Foster the traditional character of New Hampshire downtowns, villages, and neighborhoods by encouraging a **human scale** of development that is comfortable for pedestrians and conducive to community life;
3. Incorporate a **mix of uses** to provide variety of housing, employment, shopping, services and social opportunities for all members of the community;
4. Provide **choices and safety in transportation** to create livable, walkable communities that increase accessibility for people of all ages, whether on foot, bicycle, or in motor vehicles;

5. Preserve New Hampshire's **working landscape** by sustaining farm and forest land and other rural resource lands to maintain contiguous tracts of open land and to minimize land use conflicts;
6. Protect **environmental quality** by minimizing impacts from human activities and planning for and maintaining natural areas that contribute to the health and quality of life of communities and people in New Hampshire;
7. **Involve the community** in planning and implementation to ensure that development retains and enhances the sense of place, traditions, goals, and values of the local community; and
8. Manage growth locally in the New Hampshire tradition, but **work with neighboring towns** to achieve common goals and address common problems more effectively.

## **C. Smart Growth and Chester**

### **1. Chester's Essential Qualities**

At the invitation of their Planning Board and its growth management sub-committee, thirty-six Chester citizens gathered on Saturday afternoon, May 18, at Town Hall to discuss the future of their town. Camilla Lockwood, Chairman of the GrowSmart Chester Committee opened the meeting by explaining that it was the first in a series to be held as part of the GrowSmart NH Tool-kit Project. This project, co-sponsored by the New Hampshire Office of State Planning, Department of Transportation and Department of Environmental Services, is designed to help New Hampshire communities better manage the forces of growth that seem to threaten so many of the state's most important values. Camilla explained that Chester was one of three communities to be chosen for case studies. In that capacity, Chester would be responsible for holding two public meetings. In the first, its citizens would discuss what they like best about their town and most want to preserve. Following this meeting, a consultant hired by the state would evaluate the Town's zoning and other growth management policies and make suggestions for changing them in ways more likely to achieve both the goals articulated in Meeting One and the principles of "smart growth." After this, Chester would hold a second public meeting to hear the consultant explain these suggestions and to discuss them. Finally, the results of all three case studies will be prepared into a tool-kit to be made available to all New Hampshire communities.

Following this opening, Camilla introduced Chuck Lawton of Planning Decisions, Inc., the consultant hired by the state, who directed the remainder of the meeting.

Participants divided among six tables. Chuck began by asking each person to introduce him/herself and state what he/she liked best about the Town of Chester. A facilitator at each table listed these "favorite things" on a chart. The results are included below in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Chester's Favorite Things**

**Qualities relating to "Rural Character"**

abundant wetlands	
accessible open space	
birds	
dark skies at night	
diversity of wildlife & plant species	
farm life	
lack of large industry	
little commercial property	
nature	
no traffic lights	
non-commercial nature	
not looking in neighbors's windows	
open fields (country setting)	
open space	
privacy (space between houses)	
quiet town	
reasonably rural	
rural (open space, agricultural lands, quiet streets & spaces)	
rural and farm atmosphere	
rural atmosphere	
rural atmosphere	
rural means wetlands, rivers, woods, dirt roads, stone walls, sheep, cows, pigs, haying	
see and hear birds and wildlife	
small community	
topography (nice, clean, manicured)	
wildlife	
number of citations for "rural character"	26
Qualities relating to Historic Design	
appreciation of history	
historic buildings	
historic buildings	
historic nature	
historical rural character	
New England town	
public library	
rural quality	
number of citations for "historic design"	8



<b>Qualities relating to Community Character</b>	
feeling safe	
friendliness	
know who your neighbors are	
nice place to raise jkids	
safe	
sense of community (small & friendly)	
town meeting	
<b>number of citations for "community character"</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Other</b>	
formerly low property taxes	
located centrally	
location	
<b>Total Citations</b>	<b>46</b>

Several notable conclusions emerged from this exercise. First, the overwhelming majority of “favorite” qualities (26 of 46 citations) centered on Chester’s rural character. Some were stated positively: “open space”, “birds”, “stars”; others were cited negatively: “not looking in neighbor’s windows,” “no traffic lights,” “little commercial activity.” A second group of citations has to do with the “historic design” of the community: “historic buildings,” “appreciation of history,” “New England town.” A third quality has to do with the character of the people of Chester: “safe,” “a good place to raise kids,” “friendly.

Together, these citations paint a picture of a community deeply committed to its rural character defined largely in terms of open space and natural features. Secondly, it is a community committed to the small town/historic character of its built environment and generally satisfied with the quality social interaction (or lack thereof) in the town.

## 2. Chester's Most Important Natural and Built Features

In the next exercise, participants were asked to list the natural features they felt were most important to the character of their town and then the most important human-made features. After discussing these evaluations, they were asked to vote for the most important feature. The results of these exercises are listed in Tables 2 and 3 below.

**Table 2**  
**Chester's Favorite Natural Features**

Natural Feature	citations	votes
North Pond/Ledge Road quadrant, North Woods	6	9
South Woods (Herrick, Hadik, Hazelton, Bell)	6	6
Spring Hill Farm	5	4
Exeter River Watershed	4	9
Peterson Farm	4	4
Ware Farm (Spring Pond Farm)	4	2
Healey Farm	4	0
Silver Sands	3	2
Jenkins Orchards	2	3
Trails Network, Wetland Habitat, Nature trail	3	3
Pendolphin Field (view at Towle Rd.)	2	1
Chester Turnpike	2	1
Ledge Road, Old Raymond Turnpike (Pinkerton Forest area)	3	1
Black Gum Swamp	1	5
Lake Lefebre (North Pond quadrant)	1	2
Spring Hill Farm north	1	1
Center of Town	1	1
Cemetery in Center of Town	1	1
Great Hill Cemetery	1	1
Lane Road (near Patenaud Hill)	1	1
Bridle Path & Secret Pond	1	1
Pomp Road	1	1
Walnut Hill	1	0
Scott Farm	1	0
Smith Road Cemetery	1	0
Candia Road	1	0

Green Road	1	0
Wells Village/Sandown Rd. Junction	1	0
McFarland Farm	1	0
Haverill Rd.	1	0
Steam Mill Meadows	1	0
Chesterfield Farm	1	0
Wilson farm	1	0
Dolloff Farm	1	0
Root Farm	1	0
Halls Village Rd Dairy Farm	1	0
Arabian Horse Farm	1	0
Deep Hole	1	0
Schneebaum Parcel	1	0
Delorey Property	1	0

The most notable conclusion from this exercise was the wide variety of items chosen and the continuing excitement of community members in learning more about the natural places in their town. On more than a few occasions, people said, “Oh, where’s that,” or “I never knew that.” Given the variety of selections, it is difficult to draw precise conclusions about the citations and votes. On the whole, however, the variety of natural places does illustrate a pattern of protecting the interior wooded lands with their ponds and streams, the Exeter River watershed area and the many farm buildings and fields that contribute to the community’s rural character.

**Table 3**  
**Chester's Favorite Built Features**

<b>Human-Made Feature</b>	<b>citations</b>	<b>votes</b>
Chester Street Homes/Property	6	25
Ladies Aid House	5	3
Edwards Mill Dam	5	2
Cemetary on Chester St.	4	0
all the stone walls	3	6
Stevens Hall	3	1
Congregational Church	3	1
Town Pound	3	0
Legion Hall (Grand Army of the Republic)	3	0
Little Brick School House	3	0
mile marker, 1790 marker, historic markers	3	0
Grimes farm	2	3
Senator Bell Farm	2	3
Jones barn & house	2	2
all the cemeteries	2	1
dam at North Pond	2	0
Neville House	2	0
all the Class V back roads (Lane, Candia, Towle etc.)	1	3
all the barns	1	3
North Chester houses	1	1
Chester Turnpike	1	1
Rec Area, Ballfields	1	0
Silver Sands	1	0
Sears Barns (Vanderbilt & Jenkins)	1	0
Hazleton Homestead	1	0
Route 121 area	1	0
all the farms & orchards	1	0
dam at Silver Sands	1	0
Power Line Trails	1	0
natural trails	1	0
old bridges	1	0
Spollet's Store	1	0
Peterson Farm	1	0
Wilson Farm	1	0
Harantis Pond	1	0
man-made dams	1	0

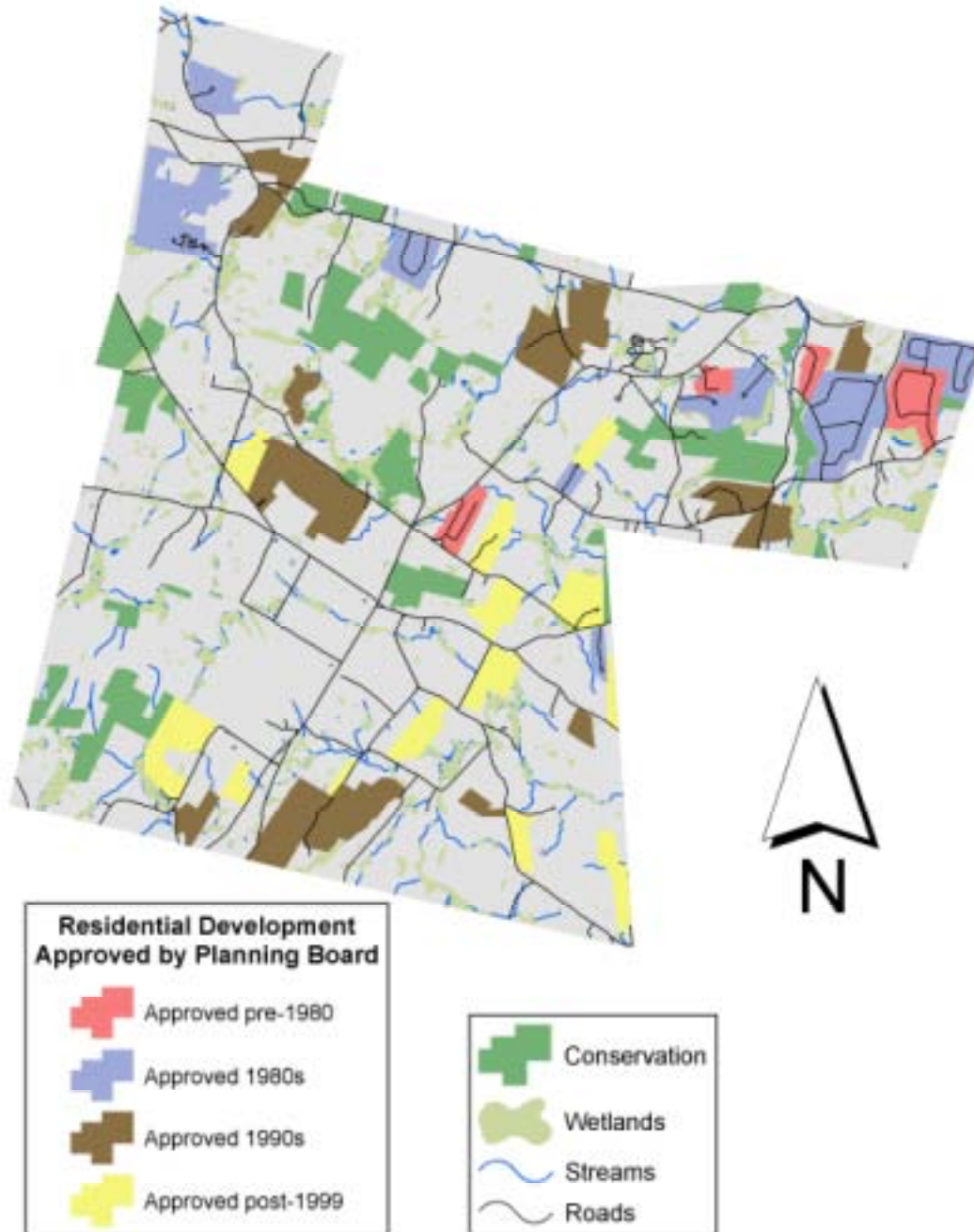
Spring Hill Farm	1	0
Healey Farm	1	0
Babins house	1	0
Library	1	0
Post Office	1	0
Civil War statue	1	0
General Store	1	0
Dunlod House	1	0
Chase Horse Block	1	0
Blaisdell clock maker marker	1	0

While the favorite natural places spanned the entire town, the favorite built places were overwhelmingly centered on Chester Street. This is consistent with the overwhelming majority of citations of “rural character” as the favorite quality. Residents of Chester value the rural character of their town and define it in terms of both the historic character and design of the buildings (and cemeteries and stone walls) along Chester Street and the open fields and woods that surround this and the other roads through the town.

### ***3. The Forces for Change in Chester***

Over the past three decades, Chester’s population has nearly tripled, rising from 1,382 in 1970 to 3,792 in 2000. Over the same period, Chester’s housing stock and, more importantly, the land it has consumed has increased even more rapidly. Figure 1 below illustrates the pattern of this growth.

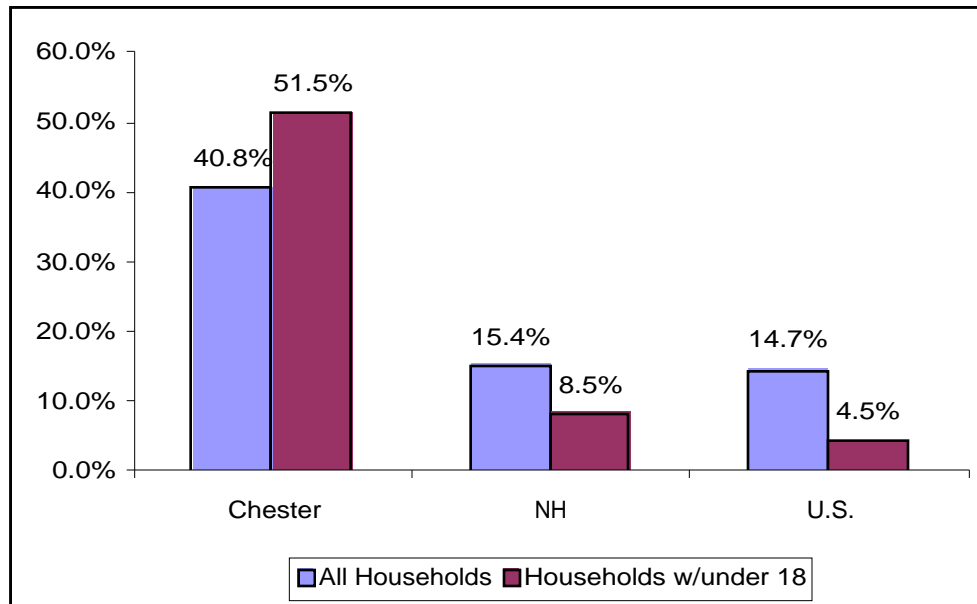
**Figure 1**  
**Residential Development in Chester, 1970 to 2000**



Source: Chester Planning Board.

This pattern of growth clearly illustrates the dilemma facing Chester. The most valued quality to Chester's residents (at least those who attended the Smart Growth meetings) is the rural character of its environment. But that very quality makes the town attractive as a place to live and hence brings in more residents, consuming more of the rural space for residential housing. Further evidence of this dilemma is seen in the nature of recent population growth. Figures 2 and 3 below clearly illustrate this picture.

**Figure 2**  
**Growth of Households by Type, Chester, 1990 to 2000**



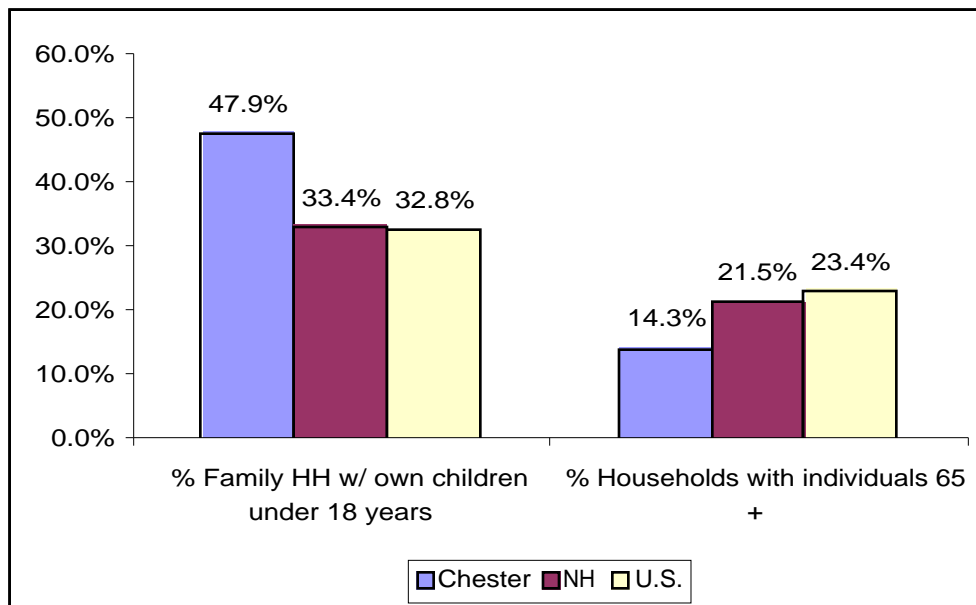
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census Census of Population 1990 and 2000.

Between 1990 and 2000, Chester's population growth differed from the state and national patterns in two important ways.

1. The number of households in Chester increased at a much greater rate than either the New Hampshire or the U.S. rate (nearly 41% vs. about 15%); and
2. The number of households with their own children under age 18 increased even more rapidly than did households as a whole (nearly 53% vs. 8.5% for the state and 4.5% for the U.S. as a whole).

Clearly, growth in Chester has been led by families with young children seeking the single family homes shown on Figure 1. The result of this growth is illustrated in Figure 3.

**Figure 3**  
**Households by Type, Chester, 2000**



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census Census of Population 2000.

In Chester, households with children under 18 constituted nearly 48% of all households, while the state and national figures were about 33%. On the other hand, households with individuals 65 and older represented only about 14% of all households in Chester vs. just over 20% for New Hampshire and the U.S. as a whole.

The point to be made from these figures is that Chester, as it plans for the future, needs to look not just at the projections of total population but also at the composition of that population and at the link between the types of homes built in Chester and the composition of its population.. Table 4 below presents the population projections prepared by the expert panel assembled by the NHDOT to evaluate the impact of the widening of I-93 as well as a possible demand for housing prepared by Planning Decisions, Inc. based on certain assumptions about the demographic composition of Chester's future population.



**Table 4**  
**Demographic Projections for Chester**

	1990	2000	% change 1990-2000	I-93 Study 2020 avg
<b>Total Population</b>	2,691	3,792	40.9%	6,369
pop 65+	159	230	44.9%	764
% pop 65+	5.9%	6.1%		12.0%
pop 18-64	1,795	2,388	33.0%	3,821
% pop 18-64	66.7%	63.0%		60.0%
pop under 18	737	1,174	59.2%	1,783
% pop under 18	27.4%	31.0%		28.0%
<b>Total Households</b>	862	1,214	40.8%	2,725
HH w/ person 65+	97	173	77.6%	510
% of all HH	11.3%	14.3%		18.7%
families w/ under 18	360	546	51.6%	939
% of all HH	41.8%	45.0%		34.4%
<b>Total Housing Units</b>	924	1,247	35.0%	2,807

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census; NH Office of State Planning, NH Department of Transportation.

Assuming that Chester moves somewhat closer to the state and national averages in demographic structure, but still maintains its above average proportion of families with children under 18, Planning Decisions estimated that the population of about 6,400 projected for 2020 would require about 2,800 housing units, or an increase of about 1,500 above its current level. Clearly the nature and location of that housing will depend upon the type of household living in or moving to Chester. Conversely, the nature and location of housing built over the next 20 years will have an impact on the demographic composition of the Town. This interplay is the essential challenge facing Chester's citizens and planners as they seek to preserve the special qualities, places and things they hold so dear while simultaneously attempting to accommodate the growth that is certain to continue to come their way.

To assist in this effort, Planning Decisions prepared two documents. The first is a summary analysis of Chester's current Master Plan and Development Ordinances made from the perspective of the Principles of Smart Growth developed throughout the course of this project. This analysis is presented in the document A Smart Future for Chester which accompanies this report. The second is a series of recommendations which Planning Decisions believes represent the best opportunities for Chester to put the principles of Smart Growth to work in its own planning. These recommendations follow in Part D. below.

## D. Suggestions for a Smart Growth Future for Chester

The purpose of the GrowSmart NH Tool-Kit Project is to help communities evaluate their development policies and regulations in light of the concepts and examples of “Smart Growth.” In the case of Chester, Planning Decisions reviewed the town’s Master Plan as well as its zoning ordinance, its subdivision regulations and its site plan review regulations. This review is presented in Appendix One.

The central problem facing Chester’s citizens and planners is the contradiction between the goals cited in their Master Plan and development ordinances and the policies designed to achieve them. The overall goal of the Master Plan is to “preserve and protect the ...rural and historic character and scenic beauty of the Town of Chester...”<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the goals of the Zoning Ordinance, listed in its preamble, call for “a dispersed ...semi-rural/agricultural residential community” and “a good balance of farms, residential units, parks and conservation areas.”<sup>4</sup> At the same time, however, the Master Plan envisions low-density residential development along all of the major roads in town,<sup>5</sup> and the Zoning Ordinance cites the goal “to maintain such a lack of density and concentration of housing that a town water system and/or sewerage system will never be required.”<sup>6</sup> To achieve these goals, the Zoning Ordinance imposes a 2-acre minimum lot size for all residential development. As is evident from the subdivision trends illustrated in Figure 1 above, this policy has not stopped the tide of suburban residential development engulfing the town. And, while it has successfully prevented the creation of a municipal water/sewer system, it has not prevented an increased demand for other municipal services and consequent upward pressure on the property tax rate, nor has it prevented the loss of open space. The reason for this failure is that the two-acre minimum lot size requirement of the R-1 zone that covers the vast majority of the town puts open space, working agriculture and suburban residential development into direct competition. To set density and use requirements for a zone implies that development of all useable land in that zone to those standards is acceptable, or even desirable. To say that a residence may be put on **any** buildable two acres in the R-1 zone is tantamount to saying that construction of residences on **all** buildable two acres in the R-1 zone is what the ordinance envisions. Clearly such an outcome contradicts both the “good balance” goal of the Master Plan and the desires of the participants in both Community Meetings.

In short, while portions of Chester’s Master Plan make reference to concepts that are consistent with Smart Growth, the Town’s zoning and development ordinances encourage the conventional suburban development that is consuming so much of New Hampshire’s open space. It is true, as one participant in Community Meeting Two stated, that simply allowing a free market for land does not “force” or even “encourage” residential development. However any analysis of the demand for housing versus the demand for the products of New Hampshire’s traditional rural industries will show which sector is likely to be the winner in that competition. Planning Decisions’ assessment of these ordinances, therefore, is that their overall impact is not to foster Smart Growth but sprawl. Chester wants low-density residential development **and** preservation

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<sup>3</sup> Master Plan for the Town of Chester, March 1997.

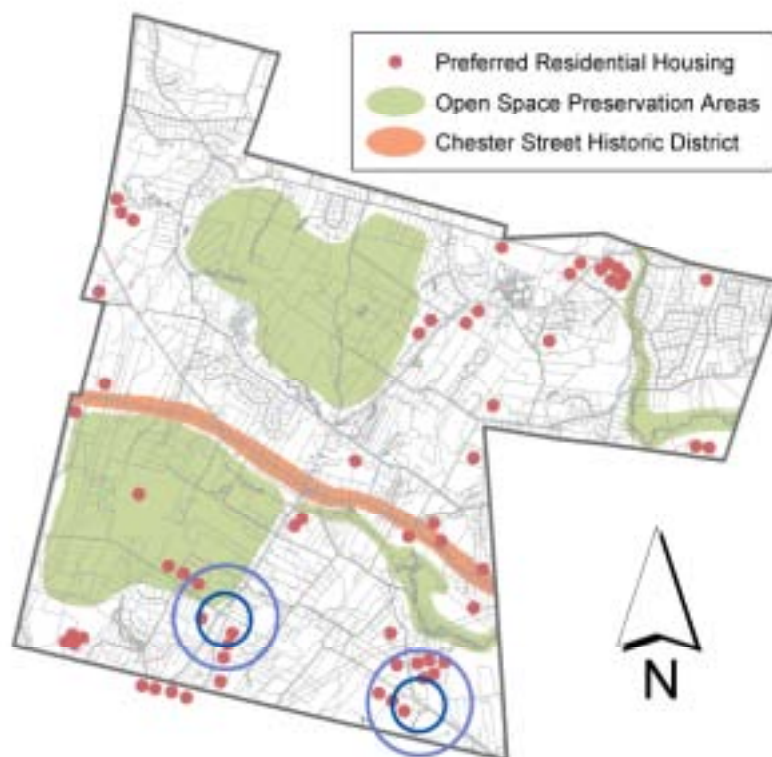
<sup>4</sup> Regulations & Ordinances, Town of Chester, New Hampshire May 2001, preamble items a and g.

<sup>5</sup> Master Plan, p. 71 and map following p. 73.

<sup>6</sup> Regulations, preamble, item f.

of its rural character. Fifty years ago, that may have been possible. Today, given the town's proximity to greater Boston and the coming widening of I-93, it is not. The choice for Chester is not between low density and concentration, but between suburbanization and rural character. Planning Decisions believes that concentrated residential development need not be inconsistent with preservation of rural character. Based on the opinions expressed at the Community Meetings, preserving rural character in Chester means two things: keeping the historic appearance of Chester Street; and preserving certain high priority areas and natural features as undeveloped. This cannot be accomplished with a single R-1 zone that, of necessity, must treat every acre in it as being of equal value. Planning Decisions, therefore, suggests that Chester adopt three zones: a Chester Street Historic Preservation Zone; an Open Space Preservation Zone; and one or several Rural Village Zones. Figure 4 below illustrates these proposed zones in a very general way. Note that the dots represent the locations for new housing selected by the participants at Community Meeting One.

**Figure 4**  
**Chester's Favorite Places with Potential Village Areas Circled**

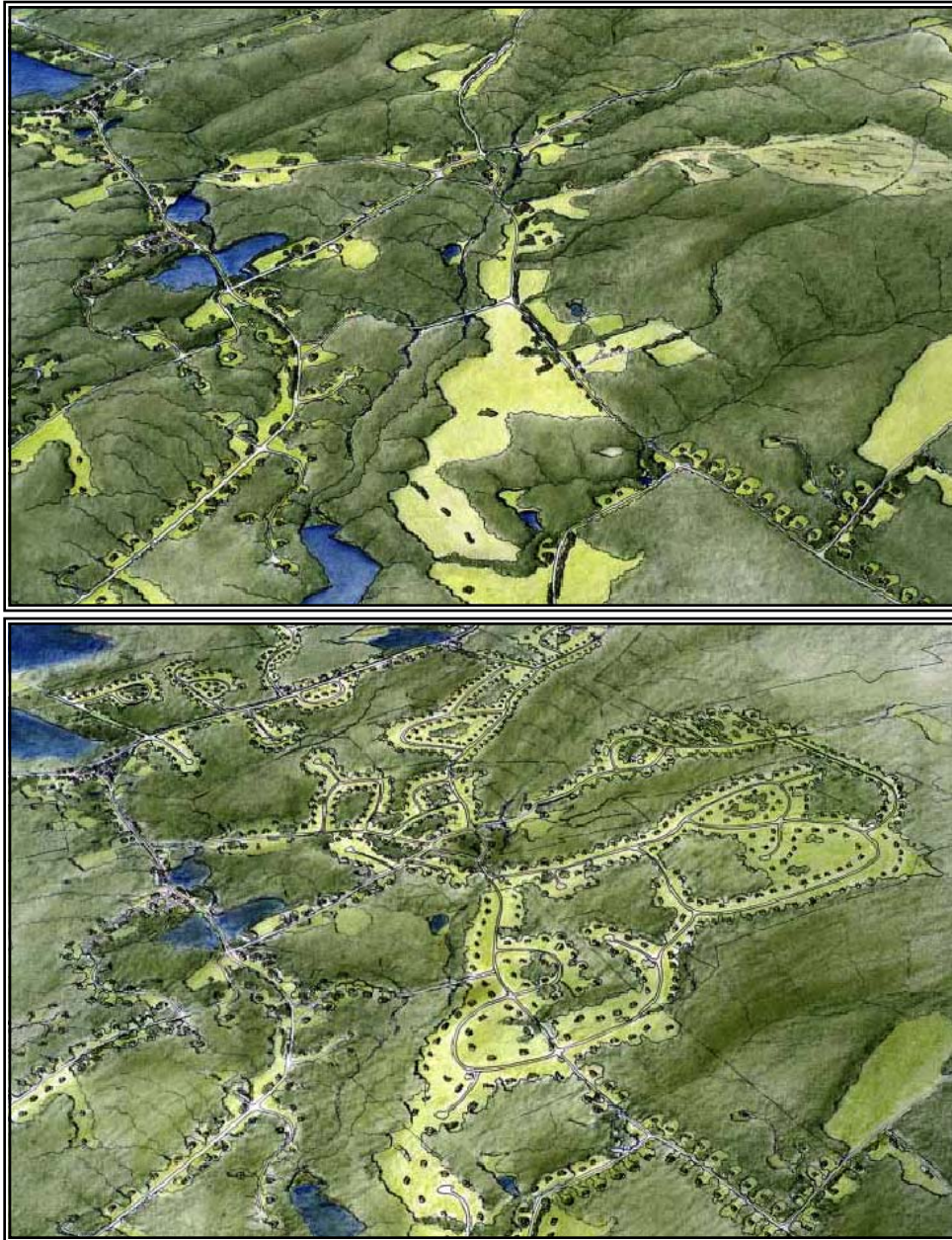


It is important to preface these suggestions with the warning that Smart Growth will not result from re-writing zoning ordinances. Rather, it will result from the creative interaction of citizens, developers and community officials. The primary stimulus to this creativity is imagination. If people think of development only in terms of the rules under which they currently operate and the projects they have already seen, little will change. If, on the other hand, they think about new ideas, decide which they like, which fit with the “essential values and qualities” that define their town, they can adjust the rules to fit the good ideas. In order to stimulate the imagination of Chester’s citizens as they undertake the process of revising their Master Plan, we make the following suggestions. Our purpose is not to say, “*This is what you should do,*” but rather, “*Think about this.*” Watching as scores of highly committed and energetic Chester citizens wrestled with these issues, it became evident that one barrier to new solutions is lack of familiarity with the range of possibilities. The purpose of the following suggestions is to broaden Chester’s vision of that range of possibilities and to provide food for thought to a community obviously deeply committed to dealing with the issues that will shape its future.

***1. Create a “traditional New England” village in one or two rural areas.***

The single greatest threat to the open space Chester citizens hold so dear is the unchecked spread of suburban style housing developments utilizing the 2 acre minimum lot size currently permitted under the Town’s zoning ordinance. Figures 5 illustrates the nature of this change in an idealized pair of images, one picturing a rural landscape similar to what Chester looked like in the 1970’s and a second as parts of Chester look today.

**Figure 5**  
**Rural Area pre & post Suburban Development**

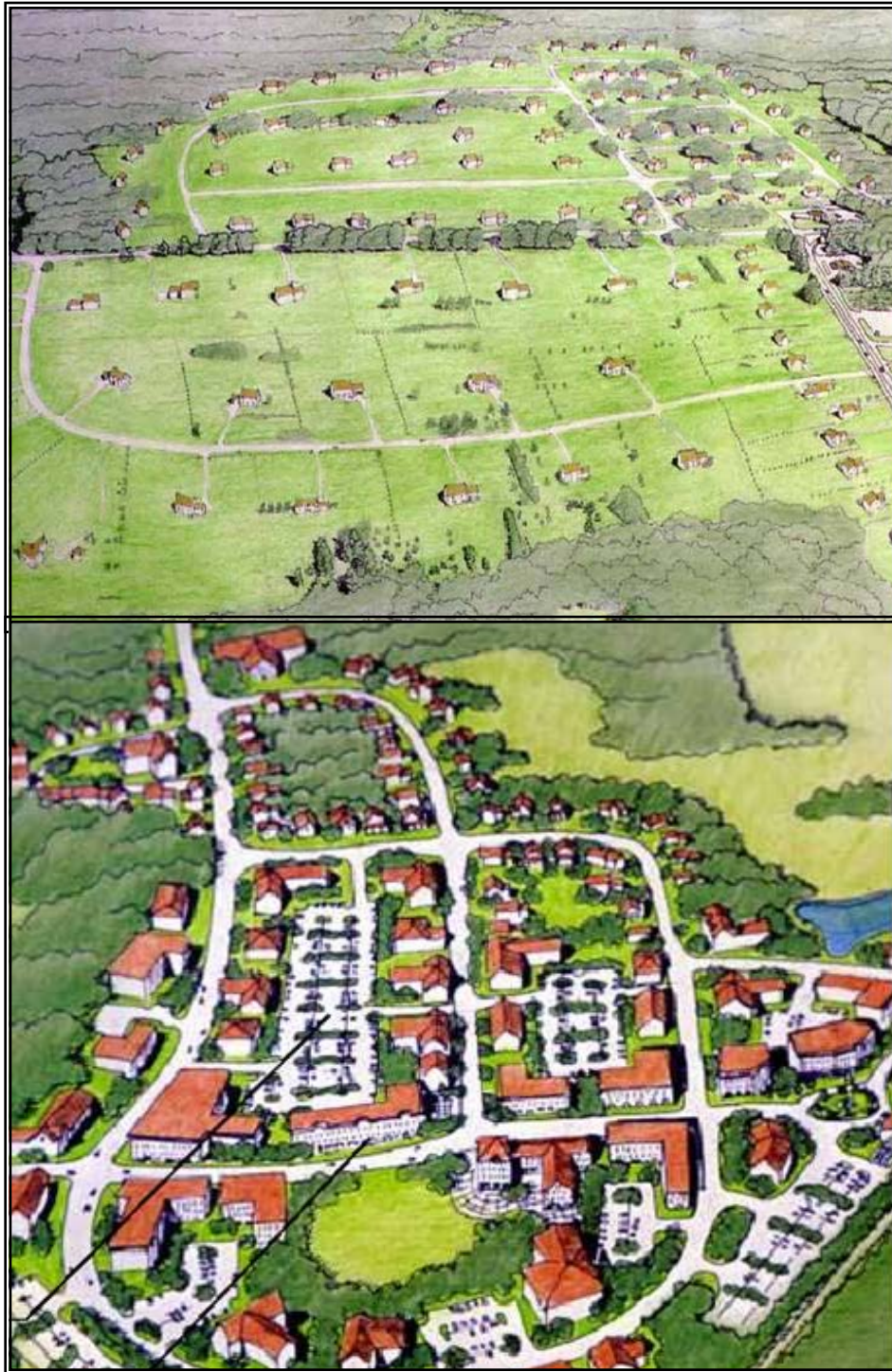


Source: South County Design Manual, Rhode Island



In a similar fashion, Figure 6 illustrates an idealized comparison of a traditional, low-density suburban development and a “traditional village development.”

**Figure 6**  
**Rural Area Suburban Development & Traditional Village Development**



Source: South County Design Manual, Rhode Island

One way to prevent (or at least slow) the trend toward increased suburbanization is to select an area to become a new village and concentrate most rural development around it. Based on the energetic discussions stimulated by this idea at Community Meeting Two, any specific location will have to be the result of considerable community conversation. The Master Plan notes two areas for potential development as “medium density” residential areas. Perhaps these could be selected. However, our suggestion is that these “villages”

- be mixed use rather than purely residential;
- be low density (7,500 SF +/- per unit); and
- include a village water/sewer system built to municipal standards and owned by the municipality.

The point of this suggestion is to encourage Chester to consider concentrating new rural residential development rather than allowing it to spread randomly based only on the ability of willing buyers to find willing sellers of rural land. It is interesting to note in this regard the results of the final exercise conducted at Community Meeting One. Participants were asked to place dots on their maps for the places they would locate 1,500 additional homes in Chester over the next 20 years. The dots on Figure 4 represent the consolidation of those maps. Of the 58 dots placed, 22 are inside or within 1/2 mile of the circles indicating possible locations for the proposed rural villages. More specifically, Planning Decisions suggests that Chester

- Create a rural village article in the zoning ordinance along the lines of the existing cluster ordinance but with several major differences. The purpose of the article would be to allow the Planning Board to entertain proposals for a rural village proposal without establishing a specific zone or specific lot and frontage requirements.<sup>7</sup>
- Allow a rural village development to include a variety of lot sizes and limited non-residential as well as residential activities, as is permitted in Zone C, section 5.4.2.2.
- Require developers to pay into an Open Space Conservation fund, an amount equal to the difference in land costs between what would be required under two acre per lot zoning and what actually is required under the approved village plan.
- Require developers to build community water/waste systems to town specifications for a village development.
- Amend the existing Cluster Development Ordinance (Zoning Article 6) to allow clusters that are included in a Rural Village Development:
  - to allocate the dollar value of their open space requirement to the Town Open Space Preservation Fund rather than be required to provide contiguous open space just for owners in the cluster; and
  - to remove the requirement that all owners of a unit in a cluster be members of a cluster specific owners association.

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<sup>7</sup> Examples of such an ordinance can be found in Randall Arendt Crossroads, Hamlet, Village, Town: Design Characteristics of Traditional Neighborhoods, Old and New American Planning Association, Planning Advisory Service Report Number 487/488, September 1999 and at <http://www.fairviewvillage.com/main.html> which describes a village ordinance in Oregon.

## ***2. Create an open space preservation overlay zone.***

Figure 4 highlights two large tracts to the north and south of Chester Street just west of the town center. As noted in Table 2 above, these areas are clearly the most important natural places in Chester, at least to the participants at the Community Meetings. Yet there is no assurance, under current regulations, that these areas or the area along the Exeter River will in fact be preserved. Planning Decisions, therefore, suggests that these two areas as well as the area bordering the river corridor and greenways that might be created to connect all of these high priority open space areas be included in a new R-3 zone targeted for open space preservation.

- Establish a municipal commitment that funds acquired from developers given lot size allowances below current standards be allocated to purchasing land or development rights in this area.
- Establish an Open Space Preservation subcommittee of the Planning Board to work with private land trusts and other organizations devoted to open space preservation to encourage them to devote their efforts to the land in these tracts.
- Establish 10 or 20-acre minimum lot size requirements in this zone, require all lots to have individual access to town roads so that any development in this zone will create no additional town roads and establish a maximum number of access points per mile of road (say 10) to prevent development of a series of “spaghetti” lots.
- Establish a River Corridor Overlay District with more stringent storm runoff controls and other measures necessary to protect the water quality valued so highly in both Community Meetings.

## ***3. Create a Chester Street historic preservation overlay zone.***

One of the key elements to Chester’s rural character is the low density, historic nature of the buildings along Chester Street. As is evident in Table 3 above, participants in Community Meeting One clearly felt that preservation of the 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> century homes as well as their associated fields, orchards and stone walls was part of the community’s essential character. To help achieve this goal, Planning Decisions suggests that the town adopt an historic preservation overlay zone requiring all applicants for development or re-development in this zone to present site and architectural and landscaping plans to the Planning Board for review. The purpose of the review would be to assure that changes along the street be in keeping with its current character. The location of this zone is noted in Figure 4 above. Planning Decisions also suggests that Chester officials contact their colleagues in Pembroke to learn from their experiences in administering the architectural design district they have established along Pembroke Street.

## ***4. General Zoning Changes***

The overall thrust of the above suggestions is to encourage Smart Growth by recognizing specific goals of the town and creating specific zones and mechanisms to help achieve those goals. At the same time, Planning Decisions recognizes that not all growth will occur in these



zones or consistently with these goals. We therefore offer these final two more general suggestions.

- Amend the Future Land Use section of the Master Plan (p. 71 to 73 and Map 11) and the preamble of the zoning ordinance to reflect the concepts of Smart Growth. These sections now are oriented almost entirely to the desire to prevent concentration. They reflect a desire to maintain Chester's rural character by allowing only low-density development along major roads. In fact, this policy leads to loss of open space, environmental degradation, loss of community interaction and the increasing tax costs of supplying services across a wide suburban landscape. Smart growth holds that limited "village" type concentrations are in fact a better way to achieve the overall goal of preserving rural character than the spread of low density, "suburban" type residential development. These concepts ought to be given equal voice in stating the purpose of the zoning ordinance.
- Seek permission from the state to amend Article 14 (Fair Share Contribution) of the zoning ordinance to incorporate the increased operational costs of new development as well as the increased capital costs. New developments increase operational costs as well as capital costs. More roads have to be plowed and maintained. Maintenance must occur more often because of increased use. One theory holds that once the development is built and has paid its "fair share" of the capital costs it required, operational costs become common and are shared across everyone based on equal assessments on property value. If, however, the marginal cost of providing additional services is increasing (more overtime to plow and maintain roads, a new truck, more teachers etc.), the effect of the new development is to raise the average cost to everyone. Therefore, adding to the impact fee an amount equal to the discounted present value of the additional operational costs generated by the new development would incorporate the true costs of development more fully into the cost of the new lot or new house.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> New Hampshire law currently allows impact fees to be assessed only for increased capital expenditures, so implementation of this suggestion would require a change at the state level.

## E. Attachments

### 1. Community Meeting One Evaluation

Evaluation of Exercises

Evaluation Question	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Okay (2)	Just Fair (1)	Poor (0)	total votes	total score	avg score
1. Chester Special Places	8	7	1	0	0	16	55	3.44
2. Future Forces Discussion	3	10	2	0	0	15	46	3.07
4. Future Growth Locations	4	7	3	0	0	14	43	3.07

Comments

Colormatch markers so color on map matches color used on flip chart.
Have map at tables be tax plot map w/town owned land already delineated; easier to get perspective where development already exists and where big parcels are located.
Much land has already been put under easement.
Present housing lacks individuality. I'd like to see that changed.
Try to involve new residents to be active in community affairs.
Some indication of information to be sought if given ahead of time as "homework" would help people collect their thoughts in advance for the workshops and would not interfere with the spontaneity.
Better management of time, or assign more time for the entire project; either end on time, or say it will run for X hours.
More discussion of variations of zoning bye-laws that affect density in cluster, multi-family etc.

## 2. Community Meeting Two Evaluation

### Response to Meeting Two Proposals

Proposal	strongly agree (4)	agree (3)	neutral (2)	disagree (1)	strongly disagree (0)	total votes	total score	avg score
1. Create a "traditional New England Village" zone	1	4	3	3	1	12	25	2.08
2. Create an Open Space Preservation Zone	6	4	1	0	0	11	38	3.45
3. Create a Chester Street historic design zone	3	5	0	2	2	12	29	2.42

### Comments

village is counterproductive to our rural character
we need as much open, non-buildable space as possible
Chester St district is OK if not intrusive on the homeowner
village should be non-commercial
Village looks like a city to me. I like "cluster" with a requirement for open space. I think we cannot point to a specific point on the map and say it would be the spot for a village.
re Chester street, maintain "rural" speed limit, sidewalks, restrict construction changes. Development restrictions are mostly meaningless because they allow little for new construction
Does number of housing units in this revised zoning turn out to be less than 2-acre buildout? If not, what about traffic, energy and resource use, age of incoming residents. None of these are addressed. They could all be the same or greater. Need for change is there, but I don't know if these techniques would work here in Chester.
I feel our cluster housing which is a smaller version of New England village is better for our needs
I like the open space preservation zone
We have tried twice without success (re Chester historic preservation zone)
make the village proposal an amended version of the Villages of Chester development
re village proposal: sounds like it will result in more houses not less
If we remove the existing town road requirement, we could include more land in this zone (open space preservation)
re Chester historic design district: Don't limit house renovations

Be sure Chester historic district is not too restrictive.
Change state law to allow tax free zones to encourage owners of large tracts to keep them undeveloped.
How would you go about doing the village, lure a developer? I'd like to see some economic studies of the viability of this idea.
I'm afraid the open space preservation zone would be struck down in court as too restrictive on the landowner.
Look at court challenges to town growth legislation throughout New Hampshire and document the results. None of our decisions here will mean anything if the Court strikes them down.
Limit village to residential, no commercial.
re Chester historic design zone: allow the homeowner the latitude to renovate and redesign.
re village proposal: very difficult to implement in its entirety; set strict limitations.
re: open space preservation: make it applicable throughout the town if the landowner chooses.
re Chester historic zone: too dictatorial.